

Unpacking Priority Area #2 of Canada's Autism Strategy - Economic Inclusion

What we heard from the 11th annual Canadian Autism Leadership Summit participants.



This brief was created following Autism Alliance of Canada's 11th annual Canadian Autism Leadership Summit. It summarizes key ideas and reflections shared by attendees during World Café discussions after a panel presentation on *Economic Inclusion*.

How you can use this brief

As a Policymaker

This brief offers valuable community perspectives on economic inclusion. Whether you're working at the federal or provincial level, these insights can help inform policies and programs that support a successful national approach.

As a Researcher

This brief highlights gaps and community-identified needs related to economic inclusion. It can help spark new research questions and guide studies that support meaningful real-world improvements.

As a Community Leader

This brief can help spark local conversations and provide context for national efforts on economic inclusion - so you can bring your community's experiences and connections into the national conversation.

As an Advocate

This brief can support your efforts to engage with policymakers and other advocates in your region. It offers a starting point for conversations about building a more coordinated national approach to economic inclusion.

Panel and World Café Engagement

Panelists discussed federal initiatives and policies that could improve economic inclusion and outcomes for Autistic people in Canada. Attendees then shared their thoughts and provided feedback. Listed below are the key ideas along with quotes to help bring their comments to life.

Panelists: Sharon McCarry, Carolyn Tinglin, Tom Jackman, Sean Wiltshire

What we heard: reflections from attendees

1. **Direct support to Autistic people must be easier to access and give people more control over how they use their funding.** Participants emphasized the need to reduce bureaucratic barriers to financial and employment supports, specifically calling for an end to redundant evaluations and clawbacks that discourage employment and limit independence.

“Streamline funding directly to Autistic people... Allow Autistic [people] to work and earn, without immediately clawing back crucial money and services (because jobs are short-term, for example).”

2. **Legislation and funding systems can create barriers instead of enabling inclusion.** Participants pointed to systemic flaws, such as inconsistent provincial implementation of federal supports, which restrict real opportunities for economic inclusion.
3. **Indigenous communities are especially underserved and need targeted resources and capacity-building.** Without proper infrastructure, clear direction, or stable funding, many communities lack programs that support Autistic people with jobs and life skills.

Box 1. Supporting Evidence from the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS) Autism [Report](#), from *Financial Stability* (p. 218)

“A pathway for Autistic people to financial stability can be achieved by disability benefits that are flexible, needs-based, and accessible, taking into consideration the extra costs associated with the condition.”

4. **Post-hiring support and mentorship is critical for sustainable employment. Participants stressed getting a job is just the first step.** Ongoing workplace support and inclusive policies are needed to maintain employment and promote success.
5. **Incentives for employers and inclusive HR practices can improve workplace accessibility.** Suggestions included encouraging employers through funding or recognition, and building inclusive hiring and onboarding practices, particularly for those directly interacting with Autistic employees.

"We need to increase access, encourage employers (with incentives?) to support Autistic people... Funding can go a long way to support organizations who support people with on-the-job training."

6. **Replicate successful, existing programs across regions instead of creating new ones from scratch.** Sharing and scaling proven models across provinces was proposed as a way to reduce duplication and maximize impact.
7. **Positive framing to employers is essential for effective advocacy - focus on strengths, partnership, and solutions.** Encourage employers to hire more Autistic people by showcasing the value of inclusion – not just the needs – and by promoting systemic change rather than one-off fixes.

Taking action on this priority

Based on what attendees shared with us, here are some clear steps that policymakers, service providers, researchers, and community leaders can take.

1. **Eliminate reapplication requirements for long-term disabilities.** Reform the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) process to recognize permanent autism diagnoses without requiring reapplication at age 18 or within a 10-year window.
2. **Support employers to foster neuro-inclusive workplaces.** Launch a targeted national employer education campaign about the value of neurodivergent talent, simple accommodation practices, and inclusive onboarding.
3. **Expand the length of employment support programs.** Modify federal employment programs to allow longer-term coaching and on-the-job support beyond the standard three-month period.

4. **Fund and promote Autistic-led employment and coaching initiatives.** Provide grants to support Autistic-run programs focused on peer coaching, advocacy, and identifying diverse employment pathways, such as creativity & entrepreneurship.
5. **Increase cross-government coordination to reduce duplication and improve impact.** Establish a task group to align provincial and federal efforts, share successful models, and reduce administrative overlap in employment and education programs.
6. **Advance housing and income policies that complement employment goals.** Assess and publicize the current impact of provincial clawbacks on federal benefits (e.g., Canada Disability Benefit), and engage municipalities in co-developing inclusive housing strategies.
7. **Normalize and fund accessible communication technologies.** Offer grants for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and assistive tech projects that normalize their use in education and employment, while building public awareness and user support.
8. **Audit employer accessibility to promote accountability.** Develop and pilot a national neuro-inclusive workplace audit and reporting tool, which flags gaps in accessibility practices.

Gaps that need attention

During the discussions, participants raised important issues that are often overlooked in policy and practice. By highlighting these gaps, we can include a broader range of voices and better address the diverse needs of our community.

1. **Economic inclusion discussions lack focus on foundational income supports and housing.** A

guaranteed basic income and stable housing are essential to meaningful workforce participation.

2. **Insufficient recognition of Autistic burnout and its long-term impact on employment and health.** There is a need to acknowledge and support Autistic people experiencing burnout, which often leads to unemployment, and mental and physical health challenges.

Box 2. Supporting Evidence from the CAHS Autism [Report](#), from *Employment Pathways* (p. 240)

“Maintaining access to disability income and benefits during early work experiences, when self-employed, and when in short-term employment positions can support financial stability and labour market participation of Autistic people.”

"We did not talk about Autistic burnout within employment. So many Autistics push through and then burn out and face unemployment and health issues."

3. **Consider funding for families for housing support.** Funding families directly for housing their adult children may be more economical than paying for agency or group home solutions in some situations.

"As a non-speaking person... funding families moderately, as an alternative to heavily funding agencies... caregivers receive almost nothing if they choose to keep their loved one at home."

4. **Translation is missing for non-English speakers.** Consider greater use of translation services to ensure equitable access to employment supports and resources.
5. **Discussions often overlook structural hiring and promotion barriers Autistic people face.** Hiring practices, especially interviews, are fundamentally misaligned with Autistic strengths. More equitable, skills-based alternatives are needed.
6. **Current financial supports for employers may reinforce stigma rather than promote inclusion.** Subsidies and incentives to hire Autistic workers can feel dehumanizing without broader cultural and structural changes.
7. **Disjointed federal and provincial programming creates gaps in access and support.** There is a need to harmonize social and employment programs across jurisdictions to eliminate inequities and administrative confusion.

The National Autism Network: Engaging Community for Impact

Attendees shared ideas on how the new Network can build trust and work together with Autistic people, families, and communities to move this priority forward.

1. **Facilitate interprovincial sharing of successful initiatives.** Create a national platform or forum to share best practices, resources, and models of inclusive employment and education across provinces.

"Faciliter le transfert des initiatives prometteuses interprovinces." (Facilitate the transfer of promising initiatives across provinces.)

2. **Centre Autistic voices through paid engagement opportunities.** Host paid focus groups and storytelling sessions with Autistic people across Canada, especially in underserved communities, to inform and guide economic inclusion-related policy and programs.
3. **Ensure continuous community consultation beyond major cities.** Establish long-term partnerships with rural, remote, and Indigenous communities that promote clear pathways for ongoing feedback, dialogue, and follow-up.
4. **Promote and support stigma reduction through public storytelling and awareness.** Highlight success stories and strengths-focused narratives to reduce stigma and challenge deficit-based thinking about Autism in employment and society.
5. **Develop and promote Autistic-informed inclusive training and certification for employers.** Co-create a national neuro-inclusive employer certification program, with embedded HR training and universal design accessibility standards for workplaces.

"Ensure employment is meaningful and the employment programs have neuro-affirming measurables. It's fine to get the job but does it last? Is there opportunity for support throughout?"

Box 3. Supporting Evidence from the CAHS Autism [Report](#), from *Employment Pathways* (p. 239)

"Autism-inclusive workplaces can also be promoted through a combination of: Dissemination of evidence-based guidelines and resources for employers and human resource professionals; Inclusive employer awards and/or certification processes; Socially-oriented job banks; Communities of practices; and Incentives for longer-term inclusive hiring practices."

Acknowledgements

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